

The following paper was written by Mary Griffith for
the Family Reunion program, commemorating the 100th
anniversary of our Father's birth
Reunion held at Salt Lake City, September 4th 1949

Our Father, Mourits Mouritsen, was born in Gulager, Hjoring County Denmark on January 28, 1849, son of Lars and Maren Sorensen Mouritsen. His sisters were Mariah, Mary, Martha, and Jane. He was the only boy in the family.

He came to Utah in September 1859 with his parents, they having been converted to the Church of Latter Day Saints in Staun, Aalborg, Denmark, where they owned a farm and a comfortable home. Their children were born at this place.

As a young man, Grandfather worked in a brick factory and was soon the head man in burning the brick. Elder P. S. Gertsen was holding a meeting in Staun and Grandfather and Uncle Hegstead decided to go to the meeting, sit on the back bench and torment the speaker and in this way break up the meeting. After the Elders prayed, sang and began their sermon, Grandfather was so impressed that he listened to every word. At the close of the meeting he invited the Elders to go home with him as he was anxious for Grandmother to hear their message. Soon other Elders came and in three months Grandfather and Grandmother were baptized by Elder Niels Peter Larson on February 17, 1858.

When Grandfather went to work the next day, his boss told him if he had joined the Mormon Church, he could not work for him any more.

It was then that Grandfather sold their farm and home and came to Utah in 1859 with Captain Nibley's Company on the ship Panobscot by the way of New Orleans to Florence, Nebraska, where Grandfather bought a yoke of oxen, a cow and wagon with which to cross the plains.

In crossing the plains, they met up with many trying experiences, as did all of the other pioneers. One day one of the oxen gave out and one of the cows was put in as a substitute. Aunt Maria, the oldest girl would drive the worn-out oxen and cows behind the rest of the company, and sometimes would get so far behind as to lose sight of the rest of the company altogether. They walked most of the way, pulling grass and feeding the animals to keep them up and going.

One day the cow could not keep up with the train so Grandfather left Father, who was then ten years old, and Aunt Jane, who was six years old, to follow with the cow. The cow lay down and they couldn't get her up again. Darkness came, the coyotes began to howl and Father prayed as he had never prayed before. After a long time, Grandfather came back for them and they were all happy to reach their loved ones again.

They arrived in Salt Lake City in September 1859 and went to Scessions (now Bountiful) where a Danish family lived. They made a dug-out in which they lived one year. Then they moved to Plain City where they built a two-room adobe house. I think this house still stands. Here Father herded sheep and worked on farms. In the spring of 1865 Dr. Williams traded Grandfather a one-room house in Smithfield for the property in Plain City. They were very happy to have a home on a creek of pure water. They built an adobe house and in later years Grandfather built a brick house in front which is still standing and in good condition.

On May 3rd, 1870 Father married my Mother (then 15 years of age) Mary Elizabeth Hillyard, in the Salt Lake Endowment House. To them were born five children--Mourits, Mary Elizabeth, John, Eliza Jane, and Loretta. They lived a happy and prosperous life for eleven years when My Mother died on January 5, 1881--just 26 years old. Mourits, John and Loretta preceded her in death. During that time, they bought the corner lot on Main and Depot streets in Smithfield with a one-room log house on it, where all the children were born. Two years before my Mother died, they built a two-story brick house. It had three rooms downstairs and the upstairs over the two front rooms was one large room which was used for dancing. It was known as Mourits' dance hall for many years. Father was the leader of the orchestra, although he could not read a note. When he heard a new tune, he would get his violin as soon as supper was over and he would practice until he could play it; not giving up until he could play it.

Father loved beauty. He went to the mountains and got cedars and planted them in front and on the east side of our new home. One is still living, but the others had to be dug up for buildings.

Father bought one of the first organs in Smithfield. He and Grandfather made brick and lime. They had the only kiln in the valley. They made the brick and lime for the Smithfield Tabernacle.

After all the farm work was done for the summer and all the brick and lime made they could sell, Father would go to the canyon and cut and pile logs. In the late winter he with other men would make roads and haul the logs which were used to burn brick and lime and also used for our firewood. There were no overshoes in those days so Father would wrap his feet and legs with sacks and at night they were so frozen he would have to cut the sacks off his legs.

Father built well. Our garage is the buggy shed that he built many years ago, and I still live in the house he built in 1878, which has the same floors, doors and everything the way he built it.

Father loved horses. He was very proud of a beautiful span of horses with a new harness trimmed with bright buckles and a new buggy, which he sold when he went on his mission. At this time he owned the corner where our home is located, one-fourth of a block; two blocks North of our home on Main Street; an interest in the brick and lime business three blocks west; a good farm in the North field; 160 acres of land two and one-half miles East of Smithfield, where he built a two-room log house.

Father lived at his home four years, nine months and seventeen days alone after my Mother died, having his meals at Grandma Hillyard's home where Eliza and I lived.

He married Susan Elizabeth Wildman and Carrie Hansen on October 22, 1885 in the Logan Temple. We all lived at home a few weeks when Father left to fulfill a mission in Denmark. While Father was on his mission, Edward was born. This was a hard time for all of us, as we had very little to live on, but Aunt Lizzie nor Aunt Carrie ever complained.

When Father returned from his mission, they were arresting men who were living in polygamy, so it was impossible for Father to remain in Smithfield. They decided that Aunt Carrie, Father and I would go to Star Valley, Wyoming to live. Father had some young horses, so they put up some food and furniture in the wagon and we left in the night on this journey. We arrived at Uncle Hans's place in Minkcreek the next night, where we rested the horses for a day. Uncle Hans had some good horses and he helped to pull us to the top of the steep dugway after we left his place. It was afternoon when we started through the canyon. There was snow on the ground and no road to be seen. It was dark long before we started up the Liberty canyon, and our horses were so tired that we all got out and walked, Father driving the team and Aunt Carrie and I carrying big rocks so when the team rested we could put the rocks under the back wheels. When we were near the top of the divide, we heard the trees breaking. Father told us to get in the wagon, as the only weapon he had with him was the ax. We had many such frightening experiences, but we finally came to a house at the mouth of Liberty canyon about two o'clock. We remained there and rested for a few days. There was a sawmill in a nearby canyon where Father could sell logs, and Bishop Austin had a one-room log house which he offered Father without rent. As our team was worn out, Father and Aunt Carrie decided to remain in Liberty for awhile. From Liberty we moved to Bennington, where Father made his permanent home.

Father was sealed to his parents on October 10, 1885 in the Logan Temple.

Father was considered an exceptional man, tall of stature, well-built and strong. In spite of the fact that the years spent in pioneering and making a new home were very difficult and sprinkled with hard times, narrow escapes and many bitter experiences, Father was equal to the task and he was very successful in everything he attempted to do. He made a good home and reared a large family to perpetuate his name.